Meredith McConnell’s Speech at the SHA Walkout

Thank you everyone for coming out today!!! I want to thank Avishan Montazer and Claire Donelan for helping me organize this event, Amelia Rozear and Ashlee Feliconio for making the shirts, and Sister Kathleen and the faculty for their support of this walkout. We are here today on the one month anniversary of the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida to remember those 17 people that died. I want to bring some attention to why people feel so passionately about gun reform. We all know that these mass shootings should not be happening, but gun control is a much larger issue.

Gun violence is a domestic violence issue. 54% of all mass shootings are committed by intimate family members. I want to tell you all a story of a woman named Jessica Lenehan-Gonzales. In 1999 she got a restraining order against her husband, who had been stalking and abusing her, to stay away from her and her four children. Less than a month later, he kidnapped the three daughters he had with her, violating the restraining order. She had called the police three separate times, and the police took no action. The next day, the estranged husband showed up at the police station and was shot dead in a shoot-out. The three daughters were then found by police, shot by their father. They were dead. Jessica sued the police department for not enforcing the restraining order, but in 2005 the Supreme Court ruled against her, saying the police did not have to enforce it. These children could still be alive if their father could have been prevented from buying a gun. In cases of domestic violence, abusers have been able to legally acquire guns because there have been no background checks to check for histories of violence. In states that have enacted background checks, 300,000 gun sales have been prevented to domestic abusers and 3 million sales nationally have been prevented. BACKGROUND CHECKS SAVE LIVES. Roughly 85% of people in the US support stronger background checks, including 74% of NRA members. This is an obtainable goal, yet congress still does not act to change anything.

Gun violence is a feminist issue. Women in the US are 16 times more likely to die by a gun than any other developed country. As a woman who is about to go out in the world alone, that scares me. I cannot lie and say that I feel completely sure that I will be safe in wherever I end up.

Gun control is a mental health issue. The organization Everytown for Gun Safety says “The majority of gun deaths in America--totaling more than 21,000 a year--are firearms suicides. Research shows that suicide attempts are frequently impulsive acts, and survivors don’t typically try again. However, firearms are among the most lethal means of committing suicide, and individuals rarely survive their first attempt to commit suicide if they use a gun. The presence of a gun in a moment of depression, intoxication, or anger can mean the difference between life and death.” “Approximately 90% of people who attempt suicide with a gun will die. In contrast, over 90% of those who attempt suicide by other methods will live, and they are unlikely to attempt suicide again.” Older men are the most likely to die by gun suicide, in part due to the epidemic of untreated mental health issues of men. Proper gun storage and the police being able to temporarily remove guns from those people greatly helps prevent deaths by use of gun. The ease at which people with untreated mental health problems are able to buy guns is only part of the issue.

Gun violence is a human rights issue. The 17 people who died at Parkland should still be here today. The 17 victims who were injured should be perfectly healthy. Their deaths were an injustice to the goodness and humanity that radiated within them. Their fellow classmates and survivors continue to speak out against gun violence to prevent any other student from loosing a friend, a sibling, a son, a daughter, a teacher, or life. Alyssa, Scott, Martin, Nicholas, Aaron, Jaime, Chris, Luke, Cara, Gina, Joaquin, Alaina, Meadow, Helena, Alex, Carmen, Peter. We remember now these 17 people with a moment of silence.

About 7 children and teenagers die EVERY DAY due to gun violence in the U.S. I pray that people learn that. After Sandy Hook, I did not think that nothing would change with gun control. I still remember when I found out in 6th grade, I was crying all night. My sister was the same age as those children who died, and I cannot help to think about what I would do without her. They would have been in 6th and 7th grade today, the same as when I found at they had died. Being from Connecticut, I do not understand how we could be so heartless as to let the issue be swept under the rug.

No man, woman, or child should be afraid to go to school and not come back alive. I beg you all, do not let this anger or sadness fade away only for another tragedy to occur. Do not let yourself become a part of one of these statistics. Use this energy to speak out. Young people are the deciding vote, you can make a difference. Remember to register to vote and call your local congressmen. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.